

Remarks on Women's Health Care

May 6, 1994

Thank you, Mrs. Bailey, for the wonderful introduction and for the wonderful life you have lived.

I want to thank all the mothers who are here for doing such a good job with their sons and daughters, helping them to achieve a full measure of ambition. I want to thank the Vice President and Mrs. Gore for being wonderful examples of good parents. And I want to thank my wonderful wife for being the best mother I have ever known, as well as for taking on this often thankless but terribly important job.

You know, since Tipper was kind enough to mention my mother—I was sitting here thinking, I know some of these mothers here. Rosa DeLauro's mother campaigned with me in New Haven, and Rosa said, "You need to get my mother to go with you. She's worth a lot more votes than I am." [Laughter] So I watched all the people along the way being too intimidated to say no, they wouldn't vote for me. [Laughter] Sure enough, we carried it.

On Mother's Day we tend to think of the wonderful and warm and kind and loving and sacrificial things our mothers do. You heard Hillary say that, like most families, mothers make the health care decisions and prod everybody else to do it. But you know, very often mothers are also the most practical members of the family and the most hard-headed and the most insistent that we face up to our responsibilities. Very often the values, the internal character structure of children is profoundly influenced by the sort of daily insistence of mothers that you just face up to your daily tasks and do your job and life will take care of itself. And that may seem terribly elemental, but one of the reasons that I ran for President is I thought all that had been abandoned here, and there was a lot more talk than action.

Now, last month, we just learned today that our economy produced 267,000 new jobs, in no small measure because the people in this National Government have begun to take responsibility for bringing the deficit down and trying to do things that will grow the economy.

Yesterday, in a heroic move, the United States House of Representatives voted to ban 19 assault weapons. It was a very difficult thing for

some of the Members, who were literally threatened with losing their seats and their political careers. But in the end, they got beyond the rhetoric to a very commonsense, old-fashioned American judgment that it was the right thing to do, the disciplined thing to do, the sort of thing your mother would be proud of you if you did. [Laughter]

I say that because I want to focus on what your mother would tell you to do in health care, not just for emotional reasons but because every day, those of us who are charged with the responsibility of working here are supposed to get up and do what my mother told me to do, which is to do your job. And my mother used to tell me all the time, "Bill, you give a good speech, but you still have to *do* something—[laughter]—in the end you still have to do something."

There's so much talk and genuine concern in this country about the American family. We're here paying tribute to it. Sunday we'll pay enormous tribute to it. And I think all of us would admit, whether we're Democrats or Republicans or independents and whatever our political philosophies are, that if the families of this country weren't in so much trouble, we'd have about half as many problems as we've got. I think we all know that. But what I want to ask you is what my mother would ask me, "Well, so what are you going to *do* about it?" And how can we be so concerned with the stability of the family as an institution, and still walk away from those stories that Hillary talked to you about? I mean, we've heard so many of these stories, we can't keep up with them all now. We literally cannot keep up with them all.

Millions of women in this country have no health insurance. Many more have insurance policies full of the kind of loopholes that you heard Hillary describe. There are policies that deny mammograms or that don't pay for well-baby visits or prescription drugs, that routinely exclude pregnancy as a preexisting condition. How can a pro-family country say pregnancy is a preexisting condition? Some insurance companies have gone so far as to call domestic violence a preexisting condition. Well, so is breathing.

A couple of weeks ago, in the New York Times, there was a remarkable column by a novelist named Anne Hood who wrote how the system fails families today. She said she was a self-employed writer and her husband had a hard time finding health insurance. And when they finally found insurance that they were actually able to purchase, the quarterly payment was \$1,800. That's \$7,200 a year for a family policy.

And still, after they paid all that money, their worries weren't over. She and her husband moved from New York to Rhode Island, and she had a baby. After the baby was born, she learned the insurance company had dropped their coverage when they moved 6 months into her pregnancy. And to renew her insurance would have cost \$2,000 more a quarter, an extra \$8,000 a year for maternity coverage. That was more than it would cost to have the baby.

Now, it seems to me that common sense tells you that if we can make it possible for self-employed people, like this fine woman and her husband, and small business people to afford to take care of themselves and their families and to stop passing on their costs to the rest of us, and we can organize it so they can buy insurance on the same terms that those of us who work for government or big business can, that we ought to do that. And it seems to me that their mothers would tell them they ought to pay a little for it and assume their responsibility, too.

We have got to try to reform this system to try to help people stay healthy and take care of them when they're sick. In any given year, about a third of all American women fail to get basic preventive services, like clinical breast exams, Pap smears, complete physicals. More than half of all American women over the age of 50 fail to receive a mammogram, often because of problems with their insurance.

In medical research, women have been on the sidelines too long, too little research into the causes and cure of breast cancer and osteoporosis. Heart disease is a number one killer of women, but until recently, all of the search for a cure was centered only on men. The simple fact is that we've paid too little attention to the unique problems of women.

I met with a lot of mothers this week whose children either have or have already died of AIDS, and there are an enormous number of women who now have the HIV virus and who have passed it along to their children, or some

have it and some don't. And we don't know whether or not there are different potential resolutions of this for women than for men.

We're trying to change all that in this administration. For one thing, I've put only women in charge of the health care struggle. Donna Shalala is Secretary of Health and Human Services. America became the first nation in the world to establish a senior Government position to oversee women's health issues. I put a woman and a mother in charge of health care reform, and you can see she's done a pretty good job, and we're all still pretty healthy.

We created an office of research on women's health at the National Institutes of Health, and increased funding for breast cancer research, for a national action plan on breast cancer, for research into other problems that affect women. We removed barriers that stood in the way of finding cures to Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. We passed the family and medical leave law, a pro-family bill if I ever saw it. You ought to read the letters that we get on that.

But if we really want to do right by the American family, and if we really want to honor our mothers, if we want the emotional satisfaction of seeing a lot of that pain taken away and the personal satisfaction of thinking we have done what our mothers would have told us to do, which is to face up to our responsibilities and do the right thing, then we've got to find a way to provide health care to all Americans, to guarantee comprehensive benefits, including preventive care, including those screenings and tests and check-ups to keep people well, not just spend a fortune on them when they really get in trouble.

We've got to preserve the right to choose doctors that women normally make the choice of. And our older women need to be able to rely on Medicare.

We can do these things. We can fix what's wrong with our system and not mess up what's right. But in order to do it, it's going to take the same discipline that was required to deal with the problems of the economy, the same courage that was required to take that vote yesterday on assault weapons, and some memory that that is, after all, what we were raised by our mothers to do. And on Mother's Day, I hope that we will all resolve that by Mother's Day next year, the women who cared for us will have a health care system that cares for them.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks,

he referred to Barbara Bailey, mother of Representative Barbara B. Kennelly, and Luisa DeLauro, mother of Representative Rosa L. DeLauro.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad of Malaysia May 6, 1994

Jones Lawsuit

Q. Mr. President, do you have any comment on the lawsuit filed against you today?

The President. Well, I thought Mr. Bennett did a fine job. I don't have anything to add to what he said.

Q. Are you going to argue that all the charges are false?

The President. I don't have anything to add to what Mr. Bennett said. I'm going back to work.

Q. Do you categorically deny the charges?

The President. Bob Bennett spoke for me, and I'm going back to work. I'm not going to dignify this by commenting on it.

Haiti

Q. Can you tell us whether you're thinking of changing your Haiti policy regarding the return of the refugees given the escalation of violence?

The President. We've had our Haiti policy under review, as you know, for the last 3 or 4 weeks. And we had a meeting about it today. We're going to meet again tomorrow. And I think we may have some announcements to make after that.

Q. About changing the policy on the refugees, sir?

Q. Have you tasked the Defense Department to do some military options just in case these sanctions cut today don't work?

The President. I don't want to discuss that. As I have said, I do not favor that option. I just don't think we can rule it out. I think it would be irresponsible to rule it out.

Q. You do not favor that option?

The President. Well, I've never favored—you know what I favor. What I've been trying to do is to get Governors Island followed. I'm trying—I think the people down there ought to

keep their word. But we certainly can't afford to rule it out.

Q. Do you think you might have announcements regarding the refugee policy, was that what you were referring to?

The President. I don't have—I'll make an announcement when I have something to say about Haiti policy. But I don't have anything else to say.

Q. Are you referring to the refugee policy?

The President. I have nothing else to say about it.

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.]

Malaysia

Q. Mr. President, you missed Dr. Mahathir in Seattle. Now that you have met him personally, how do you feel about it?

The President. Well, we haven't had a chance to visit yet, but I have been looking forward to this for a long time. I admire his leadership very much, and I admire the incredible accomplishments of his nation under his leadership over the last several years. And I look forward to establishing a good relationship with him and continuing our partnership.

I'm also very grateful for the security partnership we have had and for the contributions that have been made by Malaysia to the operation in Bosnia, to the operation in Somalia, and to being a responsible leader in world affairs.

So we've got a lot to talk about and I'm looking forward to it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:55 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to attorney Robert Bennett. Former Arkansas State employee Paula Jones' lawsuit sought civil damages for alleged sexual harassment in 1991. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.